

Controlling Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a naturally occurring fatty substance. It has both good and bad effects on the body. On the good side it builds natural hormones, and helps build and maintain nerve cells. However, when your body has too much cholesterol, blood vessel walls can thicken and reduce circulation causing heart attacks and strokes.

Your liver makes most of the cholesterol in your blood from the fats, carbohydrates, and proteins you eat. Cholesterol also comes directly from foods (animal products only) that you eat.

Measuring Cholesterol

When you get your cholesterol checked, your doctor will give you a number for your total cholesterol level. Use the following chart to determine how high your cholesterol is.

200 or below	good
200 to 239	borderline high
240 or above	high

When your cholesterol is measured and found to be high, the doctor may also check the amount of **LDL** (low-density lipoprotein) and **HDL** (high-density lipoprotein) in your blood. LDL and HDL carry cholesterol through your blood. LDL's carry a lot of cholesterol, leave behind fatty deposits on your artery walls, and contribute to heart disease. HDL's do the opposite. They clean the artery walls and remove extra cholesterol from the body, thus lowering the risk of heart disease. LDL is sometimes called bad cholesterol and HDL good cholesterol. It is desirable to have low levels of LDL and high levels of HDL. (Smoking lowers HDL levels.)

LDL Cholesterol Level (mg/dl)

130 or below	good
130 to 159	borderline high
160 or above	high

HDL Cholesterol Level

For **HDL**, a level of **35** mg/dl or below is too low. The recommended HDL level is 45 mg/dl or higher.

Controlling Your Cholesterol Level

Eating right and exercising can usually control cholesterol levels. Even when you are taking cholesterol-lowering medications, diet and exercise remain an important part of therapy.

Follow these **diet** guidelines to help control your cholesterol:

- Adjust the amount of calories you eat to maintain a lean body weight.
- Reduce the amount of fat you eat. Fats should contribute no more than 30% of your daily calories and only 10% of the fat you eat should be saturated fat.

There are 9 calories in a gram of fat. So, to calculate the maximum grams of fat you should eat each day use these formulas:

1. Multiply the maximum number of calories you eat in a day by 0.30 (30%) to calculate the maximum number of calories you should get from fat.
2. Divide the daily number of calories from fat (the answer from the calculation above) by 9 to find the maximum number of grams of fat you should eat each day.

Some kinds of fats are better than others. Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats are better than saturated fats. Monounsaturated fats are found in olive oil, canola oil, and avocados. Polyunsaturated fats are found in fish and some vegetable oils.

Saturated fat raises your blood cholesterol because it makes it hard for the body to clear the cholesterol away. Saturated fat is found in different amounts in almost all foods. Butter, some oils, meat, and poultry fat contain a lot of saturated fat.

To control the amount of fat and cholesterol you eat:

- Check food labels for fat and cholesterol content.
- Limit the amount of butter and margarine you eat.
- Remove the skin before you cook chicken or turkey.
- Drink skim milk.
- Use sunflower, safflower, soybean, canola, or olive oil rather than tropical oils such as palm or coconut.
- Choose lean cuts of meat.
- Eat lean chicken, turkey, and fish instead of red meat.
- Use salad dressings and margarine made with monounsaturated fats.
- Eat fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains daily. The fiber in these foods helps lower cholesterol.
- Use egg whites rather than whole eggs.
- Use low-fat yogurt or low-fat cottage cheese instead of sour cream.

Exercise goes hand-in-hand with good nutrition for controlling cholesterol. Exercise not only helps you keep your weight down, but also can increase your HDL (good cholesterol) level.

A good exercise program includes aerobic exercise. Aerobic exercise is any activity that keeps your heart rate up (such as swimming, jogging, walking, and bicycling). You should get 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic exercise every other day. If you haven't been exercising, start your new exercise program slowly. Make sure to stretch before and after you exercise.

High cholesterol may run in families. Know your family history and discuss it with your doctor. **In summary, to control your cholesterol level, eat healthy, exercise sensibly, and check your cholesterol periodically.**